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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses international initiatives concerning the rights of indigenous people, particularly the education of American Indians. Select United Nations and other international organizations continue to demonstrate genuine concern for the survival, growth and development of indigenous peoples. Many international efforts are in preparation for the United Nations designated "Year of Indigenous Peoples" in 1993. Education is high on the list of challenges faced by indigenous peoples. Education extends awareness and appreciation of the culture among its members and prepares indigenous peoples for productive and effective roles in the dominant economy. Recent studies of American Indian education contend that the integration of American Indian language and culture into the regular school curriculum is critical to improving student achievement. College faculty members can play a crucial role in the cultural awareness and retention of Indian college students. Helpful guidelines for interacting with Indian students include: (1) understanding and dealing with racism; (2) recognizing non-traditional leadership skills; (3) recognizing the need for a strong support person; (4) recognizing the need for long-range and short-term goals and objectives; (5) recognizing the need for understanding self; and (6) recognizing the need for a positive self-image. Faculty should also consider aspects of Indian culture which are relevant to learning such as a strong oral tradition and a preference for synthesis of information rather than rote learning. (KS)

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International Initiatives and Education of Indigenous Peoples:

Teaching and Learning to "Dance in Two Worlds"

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The Next Generation: Educating the American Indian Child

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Sovereignty Symposium IV--The Circles of Sovereignty

The Next Generation: Educating the American Indian Child

International Initiatives and Education of Indigenous Peoples: Teaching and Learning to "Dance in Two Worlds"

by

Don Betz

For the past two Oklahoma Supreme Court Sovereignty Symposiums, I have had the honor of offering international perspectives on the rights of indigenous peoples. As we stand in the shadow of 1992 and the impending global celebrations of the "discovery" of America by Columbus, it is prudent for us to consider the educational challenges confronting indigenous peoples in the Americas and beyond. The concern is dual: for the native peoples it is the challenge of learning to "dance in two worlds", and for the non-indigenous population it is the equal challenge of developing an enhanced perspective of the contributions indigenous peoples and cultures can make to the enrichment of the dominant societies.

Since the early part of the 1980s the United Nations Human Rights Commission has focused some attention of the circumstances of native peoples through two of its subsidiary bodies, the Subcommission of Minorities and, particularly, the Workshop on

Indigenous Peoples. As mentioned at last year's Symposium, one of the major tasks accepted by the Workshop has been the drafting of a set of universally-applicable rights for indigenous peoples.

The draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples remains precisely that, a draft, subject to on-going change and deliberation. But, conceptually, the draft document is grounded firmly "on the need to obtain effective international protection for the rights of indigenous peoples". (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/NGO/14 7 August 1990)

Inherent in the philosophical foundations of the draft declaration are the twin concepts of identity and development. These concepts contained the "right" to cultural development including the protection of indigenous languages and cultures in all their aspects and the encouragement of their further cultural, economic, political and social development.

The work of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the United Nations Human Rights Commission continued through 1990. Their earlier deliberations were reviewed in Persistent Peoples and International Organizations: expanding linkage in a time of rapid global change at Sovereignty Symposium III in June 1990. During the past year the Workshop in formal session for 10 days in July-August 1990 in Geneva under the continuing chairmanship of Ms. Erica-Irene A. Daes.

The most common issues raised in their sessions were the "right of self-determination, autonomy and self-government...and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures" among others. (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/42/ para. 26) Interventions were made by representatives of government observers, intergovernmental organizations, indigenous peoples organizations and non-governmental organizations.

A broad, bleak portrait of the life of indigenous peoples worldwide emerged. It contoured a universe of "...native languages vanishing, the dying out of traditional artisanal skills, the disappearance of traditional hunting and fishing grounds, the threat of immigrant populations to the preservation of traditional cultures, the lack of political representation of indigenous peoples, the dramatic decrease in life expectancy, uncontrolled industrial development and forced abandonment of traditional activities." (para. 28)

Education emerged as a focus of the group's discussions. The high levels of indigenous illiteracy was held responsible for the unequal access to the marketplace. Significantly, "the lack of adequate education was repeatedly brought up as the <u>main reason</u> for the loss of indigenous identities." Indigenous cultures are devalued in an educational curriculum designed for and by dominant cultures and taught by non-indigenous instructors. The group

suggested that bilingual intercultural education was essential to the preservation and development of a culture. "Aboriginal peoples are still mainstreamed into an educational system which does not cater to their special needs and cultural requirements causing the continued alienation of the majority of aboriginal students." (para. 37) Globally, access to indigenous language and culture in governmental school systems is the rare exception, and usually found only in those states where single or multiple minorities constitute a significant percentage of the total population.

A centerpiece of the recent international efforts to increase global awareness of indigenous peoples has been a United Nations-designated "Year of Indigenous Peoples". ("Discrimination Against Indigenous Peoples, Working Paper on the possible United Nations Activities for an International Year for Indigenous Rights"; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/41; 22 May 1990 (see Annex I). The Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1990/248 to recommend to the General Assembly to proclaim an international year for the world's indigenous peoples in 1993.

It is a year to mobilize international public opinion through a concerted public information campaign. Much of such a global information campaign will be left to governments and non-governmental organizations. In the case of indigenous rights, education of indigenous peoples themselves, especially in non-print media, is considered as important as general public

information. (A/43/711, 18 October 1988) Such a global campaign must be viewed as a facet of education as it relates to indigenous peoples affairs. In addition, preparation for the "Year" should include "holding regional training courses for indigenous peoples themselves in human rights and international procedures." (Sub-Commission resolution 1989/36, 1 September 1989)(para. 34)

The establishment of national-level indigenous agencies is a requirement of both ILO Conventions No. 107 and 169, but "...a more meaningful approach would be to support the development of indigenous peoples' own organizations, and to encourage national meetings of indigenous peoples themselves, which could offer some policy direction to Governments." The "Year" should also concentrate on promoting national institutions.

Article 30 of the International Labour Organization's important Convention on the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, No. 169, refers to indigenous peoples' right to be informed about their rights and duties, where necessary in their own languages. It further details the importance of preparing culturally-sensitive teaching materials and teaching aids relevant to the Year. Such an effort should be undertaken in conjunction with the World Public Information Campaign on Human Rights which was launched in connection with the Fortieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1989. (General Assembly resolution 43/128, 8 December 1988, para. 5)

The fundamental importance of enhanced cultural awareness when preparing materials or meetings cannot be overstated. When approving the propcsal for a United Nations seminar on relations between indigenous peoples and States, the Economic and Social Council encouraged States:

> to ensure that educational and informational activities, including national celebrations, give an accurate interpretation of history and do not perpetuate or justify theories of racial superiority or the subjugation of indigenous or other peoples. (ECOSOC resolution 1988/35 of 27 May 1988)

Article 31 of the cited ILO Convention No. 169 further provides that:

> Educational measures shall be taken among all sections of the national community, and particularly among those that have the most direct contact with the peoples concerned, with the object of eliminating prejudices that they may harbour with respect to these people. To this end, efforts shall be made to ensure that history textbooks and other educational materials provide a fair, accurate and informative portrayal of the societies and cultures of these peoples.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted

20 November 1989 by the UN General Assembly, is a comprehensive document ten years in the drafting and is seen as a companion to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Articles 29 and 30 address directly the education of native children.

Article 29 stipulates that States should recognize that education should be directed to the development of respect for the child's own cultural identity, language and values. Article 30 follows with guaranteeing the right of indigenous peoples' children to enjoy their own culture and the practice of their own religion and language.

The "First Revised Text of the Draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples", reviewed by the Working Group in July and August of 1990, addressed vital dimensions of education and indigenous peoples. All parts of the draft are still under review and open to consultations. In Part II, education, learning and the preservation of culture are highlighted. (See Annex I) They list, among others, the right to preserve their own religious and sacred traditions through teaching and practice; the right to develop and promote indigenous languages through education and through their public use "for administrative, juridical, and cultural purposes".

The right to "all forms of education" are guaranteed, "...including in particular the right of children to have access to education in

their own languages, and to establish, structure, conduct and control their own educational systems and institutions." (Part II, para. 10) A parallel right to intercultural information and contact is also stated clearly "recognizing the dignity and diversity of their cultures" and the concomitant duty of governments to take the measures necessary to eliminate prejudices and to increased understanding and goodwill. (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1989/36, Annex II)

After its meetings in August 1990, the Working group entrusted its Chairperson/Rapporteur with reviewing the recommendations and further revise the draft. A possible future role for the Working Group on Indigenous Populations as a monitoring mechanism in relation to the Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights was discussed. It is clear from the record that the Working Group would like to present the final draft to the Human Rights Commission in due time for it to play a role in the proposed 1993 Year of Indigenous Peoples.

DANCING IN TWO WORLDS

The international community sensitive to indigenous peoples rights places education high on the list of challenges that it and native peoples face. The importance of education among indigenous and tribal peoples cannot be overstated. Education serves a dual function in preserving and extending awareness and appreciation of

the culture among its members and in preparing indigenous peoples for productive and effective roles in the dominant economy. It means learning to "dance in two worlds".

There are alarming indications that Native American cultures are at risk with the passage of time. Robert Thomas of the University of Arizona has written recently that Indian culture in the form of languages and religions are foundering with young urban Indians losing contact with tradition. "In some sense, Indian tribes are becoming collections of generalized tribal personalities without a truly native institutional structure nor a coherent culture, tradition, and language. (Futurist, March-April 1990, p. 53)

Thomas concentrates on indigenous language loss over the past decade. "The tribes whose native languages are still strong can literally be counted on one's fingers." Such a loss translates into the extinction of a particular worldview. For Thomas it means "that such a people have surrendered their intellectual autonomy and independence to another society." The education and preparation of native curers and ceremonial leaders is fragmented. "Indian religions in most tribes will disappear when Indians who are now over 40 die off," Thomas predicts. The specter of colonialism looms menacingly at the edges of such forecasts. He hopes for a cultural revival among educated urban Indians, but the definition and leadership of such a movement is still wanting. Prophetically, Thomas sees a five year "window of opportunity" for

"revolutionary" steps to be taken to insure cultural and social survival. Such an effective strategy should include the "development of Indian language school texts, the teaching of course content in local Indian schools, the revival of Indian religions, and reform of tribal-government structure."

Rapid erosion of traditional culture through attempts at quick assimilation produced cultural disintegration, not cultural replacement. The result was not the transformation of Indians into pseudo-Europeans but the destruction of tribal life.

American Indian education must focus on survival and development. What should constitute the prime components? Recent studies of American Indian education contend that the integration of American Indian language and culture into the regular school curriculum is critical to improving student achievement. "American Indian students' generally poor academic achievement has been attributed to sociocultural factors, such as differences between students' and teachers' languages, cultures, values and learning styles. Teachers of Indian children need systematic training about sociocultural influences on learning and about tribal cultures." (Jon Reyhner, "Changes in American Indian Education: A Historic Retrospective for Educators in the United States", ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Charleston, WV, Apr 1989)

Indian tribes must establish education as the priority , a re-enforcing and visionary education that effectively assists the Indian child who will be "dancing and living in two worlds".

One recent example of Indians working directly for the improvement of their own educational possibilities is the Quinault Allottees Association of the Pacific Northwest. It comprises 2602 members of the Chinook, Cowlitz, Chehalis, Hoh, Makah, Queets, Quileute, Quinault and Shoalwater Bay tribes. After winning a $26 million lawsuit against the BIA over management of timberlands on the Quinault Reservation in western Washington, the native association has committed $200,000 in a scholarship endowment to Lewis and Clark College. "This scholarship is unusual...because it has been endowed and designed by American Indians for American Indians."

In their deliberations, the Association discussed ways to invest in a better future for their communities, and concluded that some of the money could best be used for college scholarships. Lewis and Clark College has been helping Indian students on campus and has offered educational programs on the various reservations. But the benefit has been mutual. "These people have been a living textbook for the courses I've taught," commented Stephen Dow Beckham, history professor, "their experiences, their frustrations and their accomplishments." (Chronicle of Higher Education, 3 April 1991, A29-30)

It is clear from recent studies and commentaries that faculty members can play a crucial role in the cultural awareness and retention of Indian college students. Daniella Hornett (Journal of American Indian Education, October 1989) contends that for faculty, this means striving to provide for student success by creating the best possible academic atmosphere. For Indian students, it means adopting an attitude of "cultural counterpoise." Counter-balancing two strong, opposing forces in an attempt to balance two identities: "one which utilizes strategies employed by non-minority students to be successful in the Anglo community, including, but not limited to, academia; the second, which attempts to retain cultural values and traditions and maintain a sense of community." This is a strategy for succeeding in two worlds.

In learning to master this "dance" native students and faculty must realize that faculty can help. "Faculty are the people who can most directly affect the motivation and desire of Indian students to remain in school." Conversely, low expectations from faculty leads to low student performance. In the case of the American Indian students, faculty themselves must be acculturated to realize there are certain basic differences in the general makeup of Indian students. Demonstrated recognition of and respect for differences will send a message to the Indian population that schools and educators accept them as they are.

These professors exist and can be identified. It is not imperative

that all such faculty members be Indian. They, however, must be student oriented, caring individuals who are open to innovative ideas that may change the normal routine of their teaching styles and classroom presentations.

At this time colleges are consumed with retention and assessment. At most institutions enrolling Indian students report that Indian students suffer with high attrition rates. Colleges and universities must take steps to ensure that their faculty, recruitment staff and student services personnel are culturally aware.

Hornett offers helpful guidelines for faculty and student services personnel for interacting successfully with Indian students. They are reproduced here at length as a checklist for all involved in education and Native American students.

1. Understand and deal with racism

A. Faculty must remember racism takes many forms.

The university system as a whole is seen as a maze and is not understood by many minorities.

Even in the late 1980s, American Indian students on today's campuses are first-generation college people with little family

experience or support to draw from in their efforts to function appropriately.

Faculty must realize Indians can do the work if the non-academics can be dealt with effectively.

B. Indians will have varying degrees of knowledge of religious rituals, treaties, the complexity of tribal sovereignty, plant and animal usage, etc. Calling on students to share parts of their culture or life with others who may not understand or who may ridicule a traditional way, although well-intended by a professor, sets up a student to feel the demean effects of racism.

2. Recognize non-traditional leadership skills

A. Indians and other minorities often have more non-traditional experiences, such as within their churches or with local youth groups.

In addition, within the Indian community, it is unbecoming and unacceptable to draw attention to oneself.

Faculty can show these students that if they can succeed within their own culture, they can succeed elsewhere.

B. Faculty can actively encourage students to participate in

department and school activities.

C. Faculty can also find ways for students to demonstrate knowledge in a non-traditional, but culturally sensitive manner; for example, by incorporating cooperative or group testing which is in harmony with Indian values.

3. Recognize the need for a strong support person

A. Family support for educational crises may be lacking due to the misunderstanding by family members who have never been to college and who, therefore, may underrate the seriousness of a problem.

Privacy and non-interference are traditional Indian values and automatically put Indian students into the position of fighting emotional crises alone.

B. Faculty can help by recognizing the needs of students early in their college lives.

4. Recognize the need for long-range and short-term goals and objectives

A. Faculty must remember that Indians probably do not operate with the same goal-setting system that majority students use--more likely to have shorter-term goals.

5. Recognize the need for understanding self

A. Indian students may function well within their homes or communities but not in the Anglo community or educational system, and may not know why.

Recognition of deficiencies must happen before self-development can occur.

B. Faculty can help by providing honest and realistic feedback. Professors may need to contact Indian students individually in order to provide specific information and clarify expectations.

This way Indian students will realize that any perceived incompatibility between their own expectations and those of their Anglo professors, are not based in racism, rather are the consistent expectations of academic personnel for all students.

6. Recognize the need for a positive self-image

A. Confidence comes with experiences of learning, success, and independence. Indian students, as well as minorities, need confidence in order to survive the educational system and eventually graduate.

They need to be able to face incredible obstacles that seem to be in direct opposition to the cultural values they have learned.

In addition, they must deal with racial biases and misunderstandings from their professors as well as from their peers.

They have to learn to bridge culture and a White institution to be accepted and to succeed.

Minorities learned long ago that Anglos have their ideas of the uselessness of minority people and minority cultures unless it fits their needs.

Hornett summarizes by predicting that the retention and graduation rates of all minorities will continue to fall far below those of majority students until everyone involved becomes aware of, and sensitive to, cultural and racial differences and acts to eliminate the external as well as the internal barriers to education. Professors stand in a unique position to influence native students' self-image and self-esteem, crucial factors for any student. "Professors are in most advantageous positions to send positive messages to all minority people that colleges will accept them as they are, complete with differences."

Faculty who are willing to employ variable methods in dealing with

Indian students will probably increase the likelihood that these students will stay in school due to the opportunity to express their true abilities. "American Indian students need the recognition of a special faculty person who has sensitivity and awareness of cultural differences."

But even the best intentioned and most clearly motivated educator must deal with the enduring legacy of US Indian policy. In 1978 Joseph Jorgensen, in speaking of the history of Indian policy, revealed that the "underlying theme, the ideological motor that has driven this history, has always been a desire to transform Indian culture into white culture, to integrate Indians into the fabric of American life as it is perceived by business, and federal, and Christian interests." (Daniel L. Boxberger, "Individualism or Tribalism?: The "Dialectic" of Indian Policy", American Indian Quarterly, Winter 1991)

Additionally, Russell Barsh illustrated that we cannot understand the present situation in learning to "dance in two worlds" without a sober awareness of the complex factors that have shaped tribal institutions and created a relationship best described as dependent, internal colonies. This is a relationship that has taken many years to develop and not one that can be rectified with any "quick-fix" solutions.

"It does not matter if the stated intent of the federal government

has been assimilation into white society or separation into tribal society, the result has been the same. Indian resources are moved into the dominant, externally controlled economy and Indians remain impoverished."

Of particular relevance to the challenge of education and American Indians are the results of the inquiry by Cathaleene J. Macias. ("American Indian Academic Success: The Role of Indigenous Learning Strategies", Journal of American Indian Education, August, 1989) She chronicles some of the difficulties that Indian people face in dominant-culture schools and highlights some of the unique cultural proclivities that can be advantageous to Indians in educational institutions.

"Perhaps the most important result of our interviews is the identification of specific aspects of Indian culture and experience that are advantageous to graduate school performance" she offered. Paula Gunn Allen, the respected Indian writer and scholar, tells us that empathetic, participatory listening in silence is an important part of Indian oral tradition.

Ms. Macias proposes that the strong oral traditions that are common to all American Indian tribes predispose Indian people to listen intently to both elders and teachers in a non-demonstrative, introspective way, experiencing fully what they hear.

Difficulties encountered in school including adjusting to an urban environment, gaining command of the appropriate terminology of a discipline as expressed in journal articles. "In some cases the women blamed their limited vocabulary on an inferior education, with most it was due to lack of opportunities to use academic, professional language."

Importantly, since Indian children have been found to do well at tasks requiring synthesis of complex information, but not so well at tasks which are arbitrary and require rote memory, it is important that educators structure what they teach in ways meaningful and relevant to Indian students. It is also essential that educators develop and encourage the synthesis abilities of Indian students. It may well be that Indians who do succeed academically do so because they have relied heavily upon a cultural predisposition to integrate and relate what they learn.

It is clear that the Indian students' stated preference for essay tests needs to be reconsidered in light of their reported tendency to synthesize and integrate what they learn. "Almost every woman in our interviews reported that she felt her ideas "flow" once she began to answer an essay test question, each idea connecting with another in either contrast or complementarity," Macias commented.

These researchers also found that synthesizing ability is unrelated to performance on multiple-choice and short-answer tests. The mode

of assessing outcomes for native students directly influences the outcome. In this case, the medium may be distorting the message. College faculty should be informed that multiple-choice tests are inappropriate for assessing the learning of Indian students, and Indian students should be warned to "shelve" their synthesizing tendency when taking this type of test.

It becomes apparent that education in general, and graduate education in particular, need to reevaluate their demands on Indian students and reassess their expectations for Indian student success and the means for measuring performance.

Particular cultural characteristics should be recognized as the assets they are. Unique learning patterns as those mentioned here may be applicable to other peoples and cultures with strong oral traditions. Further they may offer alternative developmental learning models for African-Americans and Hispanics who are having the least success under the current educational system. Beyond the real educational needs of Indian students, fully one-third of the nation will be African-American or Hispanic. It is clear that many peoples have not mastered the "two-world dance".

CONCLUSION

Facets of the international system continue to demonstrate genuine concern for the survival, growth and development of indigenous

peoples. This involvement is most clearly expressed through the work of select United Nations and other international organizations as well as through the efforts of a host of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It is imperative to note well that these global interest groups recognize that THE key to preservation and enhancement of indigenous peoples and their rich cultures is mastering the "dance in two worlds", recognizing that neglect of either domain will impair the individual's and group's possibilities for genuine development. There is a burgeoning, global network of actors, both international and non-governmental, active in many dimensions of indigenous and tribal life, eager to expand their work with indigenous peoples. They stand prepared to inform the nation-states and their citizens about the limitless contributions of native peoples, and the obligation of states to preserve, protect and defend all indigenous and tribal populations.

Equally, these supportive forces understand fundamentally that "no one is developed; one develops oneself". Relevant, culturally-sensitive education is the essential tool for indigenous peoples to become not only the preservers of tradition, but the architects and engineers of their future.

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